

God Came Down

(The Fourth Gospel)

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The Gospel in Outline

A subtitle of this study could be called “A Christological Drama.” It presents the highest Christology of the NT and it is a “drama” because it is the story of redemption presented in “dramatic” format played out on the stage of earth in a remote area of the world called the land of Israel. It is beautifully and “inspirationally” developed with characters or players, action, script (dialogue, monologue, and narrative), and themes, all of which are a part of this divine which is intended to call for the belief that Jesus was more than a prophet from Galilee or the Messiah in the tradition sense of messianic expectation.

There are many grand and intriguing themes running throughout the Fourth Gospel; one theme, however, dominates, the theme of “belief verses disbelief.” In fact, this theme weaves itself throughout the whole composition. John's concern is to inform our faith christologically (i.e., to give content to our faith with reference to the true identity of Nazareth was). But all of this is to one end, *viz.*, that we may believe. During Jesus' ministry many people came to believe in him, while others disbelieved. Why some believed while others did not is a critical question in this Gospel, and it is a question of critical relevance to us today. John's Gospel develops from one text (or scene) to the next addressing this question. These units of text consist of episodes, monologues or dialogues, and editorial comments in which some aspect of Jesus' Messianic identity is revealed, resulting in either belief or disbelief.

The Gospel of John breaks into three parts following the prologue (1:1-18), (1) the Messiah is here: his public ministry (1:19-12:50), (2) the Messiah and his disciples: the farewell discourses to the twelve (13:1-17:26),

and (3) the passion and resurrection material (18:1-19:42). In the prologue the theme of belief is introduced (see 1:7, 11-12), then in the first major section of material (the Messiah is here: his public ministry - 1:19-12:50) John begins the development of this theme.

PROLOGUE (1:1-18)

The Word Became Flesh and Dwelt Among Us

[John set the task he is undertaking in this divine drama and the thesis he is presenting concerning the identity of Jesus, viz., his Christology, which is the highest Christology of all the Gospels.]

PART ONE (1:19-12:50)

The Messiah is Here: His Public Ministry

[After he presents his belief in the divinity of Jesus he begins at the beginning of his ministry, where his messianic began it development from Nazareth to Jerusalem. The Messianic expectation was very high at this time in the history of Israel. In the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah had come. John presents Jesus' Messianic activity in this section by means of locations.]

ACT ONE (1:19-2:12)

The Messianic Expectation in Judea and Galilee

Scene One (1:19-28): John the Baptist and the Pharisees

Scene Two (1:29-34): Jesus' Messianic identity revealed to John

Scene Three (1:35-42): Andrew and Peter discover the Messiah

Scene Four: (1:43-51): Philip and Nathaniel discover the Messiah

Scene Five (2:1-12): Jesus changes water into wine, his disciples believe

ACT TWO (2:13-3:21)

Jesus in Jerusalem: the First Feast [Passover]

Scene One (2:13-22): Jesus Cleanses the Temple in Jerusalem

Scene Two (2:23-3:21): Jesus and Nicodemus
Discourse on the New Birth

[Note the theme of **belief** that dominates these scenes. Jesus' earliest activity in Jerusalem is that of confrontation with the Jewish religious hierarchy. God was not there in the temple and its ritual. Judaism had distorted the revelation of God as was manifested in the ancient worship of the tabernacle and temple. They had turned it into a merchandising mart for the profit of the family of Annas, a "godfather figure" who controlled the Jerusalem religious hierarchy. Jesus had come to "show us the Father." The first thing he did was to remove this disgraceful distortion of God represented by the Jewish priesthood. Two reactions develop from this first cleansing (Jesus cleansed the temple twice): he incurred the wrath of the Jewish religious leaders (and was thereafter in constant conflict with this group), and he aroused a suspicious curiosity on the part of some of the Jewish leadership that he may have truly been sent from God; cf. the visit of Nicodemus.]

ACT THREE (3:22-36)
Jesus in Judea

Scene One (3:22-30): The Herald of the Messiah: "He Must Increase, I Must Decrease"

Scene Two (3:31-36): Editorial Comment by the author

[Note in John's commentary on the speech of the Baptist how central the theme of belief is to everything he is saying]

ACT FOUR (4:1-42)
Jesus in Samaria

Scene One (4:1-6): Setting for the Discussion with the Woman in Samaria

Scene Two (4:7-19): Discourse on Living Water

Scene Three (4:20-26): Discourse on Worship

Scene Four (4:27-30): The Woman Tells of Her Discovery

Scene Five (4:31-38): Jesus' Discussion with His Disciples

Scene Six (4:39-42): Response of the Samaritan Village

[Note here again how dominant the theme of belief is throughout this whole block of material. The woman realizes who he is, she runs to the village

with her discovery. They come to see for themselves and believe]

ACT FIVE (4:43-54)

Jesus in Galilee

Scene One (4:43-45): Reception by the People of Galilee

Scene Two (4:46-54): Healing of the Nobleman's Son

[Here again belief is the theme of these scenes and Jesus is the object of that belief.]

ACT SIX (5:1-47)

Jesus in Jerusalem: Second Feast

Scene One (5:1-9a): Healing at the Pool of Bethesda

Scene Two (5:9b-18): Following Sabbath Controversy

Scene Three (5:19-29): Jesus' Messianic Claims

Scene Four (5:30-47): The Case Substantiating His Claims

[Jerusalem again is the theme of antagonism and disbelief. Why does belief seem to result everywhere but in Jerusalem?]

ACT SEVEN (6:1-71)

Jesus in Galilee: Third Feast [Passover]

Scene One (6:1-15): Feeding of the Five Thousand

Scene Two (6:16-21): Jesus Walks on the Water

Scene Three (6:22-25): Setting for the Bread of Life Discourse

Scene Four (6:26-65): Discourse on the Bread of Life

Scene Five (6:66-71): Disbelief and Belief

[Act Seven consists of two episodes of Messianic activity on the part of Jesus and the belief of the disciples, then follows an exchange between Jesus and the people wherein they turn from him when he challenges them to believe that he has come from God. The material then concludes with a scene wherein the disciples again affirm their belief]

ACT EIGHT (7:1-10:21)
Jesus in Jerusalem: Fourth Feast [Tabernacles]

- Scene One (7:1-13):** Jesus Goes Up to the Feast
- Scene Two (7:14-24):** Jesus Teaches in the Temple and Is Challenged by the Jewish hierarchy
- Scene Three (7:25-36):** Debate among the People Concerning the Messiah
- Scene Four (7:37-44):** Jesus Calls upon the People to Believe in Him
- Scene Five (7:45-52):** Reaction of the Jerusalem Leaders to the Excitement Created By Jesus
- Scene Six (7:53-8:11):** Jesus and the Woman Caught in the Act of Adultery
- Scene Seven (8:12-20):** Jesus Continues to Teach in the Temple, the Leaders Continue To Challenge His Claims
- Scene Eight (8:21-30):** Jesus Continues his Messianic Claims and Calls upon the Jews To Believe In Him.
- Scene Nine (8:31-59):** Jesus Debates with the Jews and Continues His Messianic Claims
- Scene Ten (9:1-5):** The Man Born Blind and the Question of Human Suffering
- Scene Eleven (9:6-12):** Jesus Heals the Man Born Blind
- Scene Twelve (9:13-34):** Reaction of the Pharisees to the Miracle
- Scene Thirteen (9:35-41):** Jesus Reveals His Identity to the One Healed and the Man Expresses His Belief
- Scene Fourteen (10:1-18):** Discourse on the Good Shepherd
- Scene Fifteen (10:19-21):** Reaction to His Speech: Belief/Disbelief?

[Throughout this block of material one sees the repeated interaction between belief and disbelief. Jesus repeatedly makes claims concerning his identity; some respond to these claims in belief, others in disbelief. Why there are such different reactions is a question John wishes to keep before us. When we have answered this question with reference to the original players in this first century drama, then we must answer it for ourselves with reference to the players of the drama of which we are a part.]

ACT NINE (10:22-39)
Jesus in Jerusalem: Fifth Feast [Hanukkah]

- Scene One (10:22-30):** The Jews Demand that Jesus Tell Them if He Is the Messiah
- Scene Two (10:31-39):** Reaction of the Jews to His answer

ACT TEN (10:40-12:8)

Jesus In Judea

Scene One (10:40-42): Jesus Retires beyond the Jordan

Scene Two (11:1-16): Receives Word of Lazarus' Death

Scene Three (11:17-27): Jesus' Discussion with Martha

Scene Four (11:28-33): Jesus' Discussion with Mary

Scene Five (11:34-44): Jesus Raises Lazarus from the Dead

Scene Six (11:45-53): Reaction of the People - Many Believe and the Jewish Leaders Determine to Have Him Assassinated

Scene Seven (11:54-57): Jesus Withdraws into the Desert with his Disciples

Scene Eight (12:1-8): Jesus Returns to Bethany and Is Anointed for His Death

ACT ELEVEN (12:9-50)

Jesus in Jerusalem

Sixth Feast [Passover]

Scene One (12:9-19): Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem

Scene Two (12:20-36a): Jesus Declares that the Time of His Death is Near

Scene Three (12:36b-43): Jesus Condemns the Jews for Their Disbelief

Scene Four (12:44-50): Jesus Final Public Discourse: a Plea for Belief

The theme running throughout Part One of this composition is "belief vs disbelief." The Greek verb *pisteuo*, meaning "I believe," occurs 98 times in this Gospel, as compared to 58 occurrences in all of Paul's writings and 52 in Luke and Acts. The theme of "belief/disbelief" is found more in this Gospel than in any other New Testament Gospel, or New Testament writing. Why this is such a critical theme for this apostle is a question of major importance. Belief to John is redemptive, but belief in what? Belief in what God has revealed. But what has he revealed? Himself in his Son! What is to be believed is John' Christology. The Christology of John's Gospel is, in essence, God's revelation of himself in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is not only a redeemer come from above, he is a revelation come from above, who redeems through his revelation. Those who believe are those who see what is there to be seen, those who are attracted to the light, whose existence the light has illuminated and who began to walk in that light. Those who do not see are blind. They are in darkness. They misunderstand,

they distort, they lie, and consequently, they remain in darkness, and even love the darkness. Not only do they refuse to see the light they plot to destroy the light so that no one else may see it; but this love of darkness has its roots in disbelief. The only hope of redemption is belief in God's revelation - and that revelation is Jesus of Nazareth who was both Son of Man and Son of God. Those who come to faith are those who have grasped the fact that in him God has become one of us in order that he might reclaim the human race by recreation it "in Christ."

PART TWO (13:1-17:26)

TEACHING THE TWELVE *(The Farewell Discourses)*

These chapters (13-17) may be broken down in a variety of ways. Some see only one farewell discourse running throughout chapters 13-17. Others, however, see at least three different discourses: the first, which occurs in the upper room (13:31-14:31), the second, which occurs in route to the Garden (15:1-16:33) and, third, the prayer for the twelve, which occurs just before they cross over into the Kidron valley (17:1-26). Although the material found in these chapters consists, for the most part, of monologues from the lips of Jesus, it is all "discourse material" in a literary sense. This material (John 13-17) may be structured as follows.

ACT ONE (13:1-14:31)

In the Upper Room at the Passover Meal

Scene One (13:1-30): Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet and Foretells His Betrayal

- (1) Jesus Washes the Disciples' Feet (13:1-11).
- (2) Jesus Interprets what He Has Done (13:12-20).
- (3) Foretells His Betrayal and Reaction of the Twelve (13:21-30).

Scene Two (13:31-14:31): First Farewell Discourse

- (1) Monologue: The Hour Has Come (13:31-35).
- (2) Dialogue: Foretells Peter's Denial (13:36-38).
- (3) Monologue: "I Am the Way" (14:1-7).

- (4) Dialogue: "Show Us the Father" (14:8-14).
- (5) Monologue: The Promise of the Spirit (14:15-31).

ACT TWO (15:1-17:26)

On the Way to the Garden

Scene One (15:1-16:33): Second Farewell Discourse

- (1) Monologue: "I AM the Vine" (15:1-8).
- (2) Monologue: "Love - the Mark of a Disciple of Jesus" (15:9-17).
- (3) Monologue: "The World Will Hate You" (15:18-25).
- (4) Monologue: "The Spirit Will Come" (15:26-16:15).
- (5) Monologue: "Soon You Will See Me No More" (16:16-28).
- (6) Dialogue: The Reaction of the Twelve (16:29-33).

Scene Two (17:1-26): Third Farewell Discourse [Prayer]

- (1) Monologue: "Father, the Hour Has Come" (17:1-5).
- (2) Monologue: "I Am Praying for Them [The Twelve]" (17:6-19).
- (3) Monologue: "I Pray for All those Who Believe in Me through Them (17:20-26).

PART THREE (18:1-21)

THE PASSION AND RESURRECTION

[The material of Part Three has more in common with the Synoptic Gospels, indicating that something of a fixed tradition had developed to preserve the account of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, which Paul identifies as "the gospel" (1 Cor 15:1-4).]

ACT ONE (18:1-19:42)

Jesus' Arrest, Trial, and Crucifixion

Scene One (18:1-12): Jesus' Arrest in the Garden

Scene Two (18:13-27): The Jewish Trial [Peter's Denial]

Scene Three (18:28-38a): The Roman Trial

Scene Four (18:38b-40): The Jews Demand Jesus' Death

Scene Five (19:1-5): Jesus Is Beaten and Crowned with Thorns

Scene Six (19:6-16): The Jews Leaders Again Demand His Death

Scene Seven (19:17-30): The Crucifixion and Death of Jesus

Scene Eight (19:31-37): The Piercing of His Side

Scene Nine (19:38-42): The Burial of Jesus

ACT TWO (20:1-31)

**First Collection of
Resurrection Appearances**

Scene One (20:1-10): The Empty Tomb

Scene Two (20:11-18): Jesus' Appearance to Mary Magdalene

Scene Three (20:19-23): Jesus' Appearance to the Ten Disciples

Scene Four (20:24-29): Jesus' Appearance to Thomas and the Other Ten

Editorial Comment (20:30-31): "These Things Are Written" (First Ending)

ACT THREE (21:1-25)

Second Collection of Resurrection Appearances (21:1-25)

[It is possible that this material is an addendum [or epilogue] to the first ending of this Gospel. It was possibly added by John or one of his disciples to address a circulating tradition that Jesus was to return before John's death. It was necessary to deny this tradition to prevent a large falling away by Christians who may have lost their faith in the event of John's death.]

Scene One (21:1-14): A Resurrection Appearance to Several Disciples at the Sea of Galilee (Jesus' return before John's death.)

Scene Two (21:15-19): Jesus' Conversation with Peter

Scene Three (21:20-23): Corrective Teaching Concerning the Return of Jesus and the Death of the Beloved Disciple

Editorial Comment (21:24-25): Personal Authentication of the Author and Final Conclusion

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